



Childhood Connections

November 1, 2023

Spotlight on Professionals

Spotlight on Professionals aims to share stories from those working in childhood programs. This includes all professionals, such as home visiting, early intervention, child care, Head Start, preschool, and afterschool. These stories are also available on the [Early Connections website](#).



This month's "Spotlight on Professionals" highlights the work of Home Visiting Supervisor, Erin Wehmeier, of Healthy Families of America. Erin has loved working with children since she was young and remembers pretending to be a teacher when she was a child. She obtained her degree in Early Childhood Education from the University of Illinois in 2004. Erin began teaching in 2008, and for 11 years, she taught in private and public school settings.

As a foster parent, Erin recognized the value of the trauma-informed training she received and felt passionate in supporting the birth families of the children she fostered. After moving to Missouri and discovering the Parents as Teachers (PAT) program and Healthy Families of America she began working with birth mothers of the children she had fostered, teaching them the parenting skills she had acquired through her trauma-informed training.

In just eight months, she became a supervisor in the Healthy Families of America program, showcasing her dedication and effectiveness. In 2021, funding changes led Erin to Community Partnership of the Ozarks, where she continues to serve in her supervisory role along with a full home visiting caseload. Her story is a testament to the power of dedication, compassion, and the desire to help others. Her journey is an inspiration to all who seek to make a positive impact on the lives of children and families.

"Children are our future, and we need to invest in them and meet their needs educationally and emotionally."

ANNOUNCEMENT! Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is Coming Statewide to Missouri





The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and The Dollywood Foundation are working together to launch Dolly Parton's Imagination Library across Missouri on **November 8**. Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is dedicated to inspiring a love of reading by delivering high-quality, age-appropriate books each month to the homes of registered children under age 5, at no cost to the family.

The Missouri Imagination Library was made possible by legislation (Section 178.694 RSMo) that identifies school districts as the local partner for this initiative. Full funding was included in DESE's Fiscal Year 2024 budget to establish and administer Dolly Parton's Imagination Library for all children in Missouri age 0-5.

There will be no cost to schools for the books or the postage to deliver them. Watch for an Administrative Memo in the coming week with details for school leaders on the November 8 launch and how schools can help families in your community sign up to receive books.

SAVE THE DATE! Conference on the Young Years

IMPORTANT! New MOPD System Phone Number

The Missouri Professional Development (MOPD) system has a new phone number. Please call **573-526-8273** for any questions about using the MOPD system or email mopd@dese.mo.gov.

REMINDER! Early Childhood State Advisory Council (ECSAC) Meeting

The next meeting of the Early Childhood State Advisory Council (ECSAC) will be held virtually on Tuesday, January 23, 2024, at 12:30 p.m.

The agenda and related presentation materials will be posted on the [ECSAC meeting webpage](#) approximately one week before the meeting.

NEW! Strategic Plan Progress Report

On October 10, 2023, Office of Childhood (OCC) staff presented a Strategic Plan Progress Report to the ECSAC.

The report gives a status update on each of the 2023 action items planned for this year and highlights one action item from each of the OOC's four big goals.



The 51st Conference on the Young Years will be **March 7-9, 2024**, at Tan-Tar-A Conference Center in Osage Beach, Missouri. The 2024 theme for the conference is "Explore the Possibilities."

The OOC is planning a great lineup of keynote and featured speakers along with many breakout session presenters.

Vendors and exhibitors may now [reserve their booth space for CYY 2024](#). Sponsorships are also available.

Make plans to join us for the 2024 conference and "Explore the Possibilities" with us.

ANNOUNCEMENT! Additional Missouri Quality Prekindergarten (MOQPK) Grants are Available

An additional round of state funds are available to local education agencies (LEAs) and child care programs that apply for MOQPK Grants designed to serve students in the year prior to kindergarten (age four by July 31, 2023). This funding can support a prekindergarten classroom operating as of January 15, 2024.

- Per House Bills 2 and 20, eligible providers must meet the quality standards in statute ([161.213 RSMo](#)) and serve children in the year prior to kindergarten (age four by July 31, 2023) who are at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty level.
- Visit the [MOQPK website](#) for Round 2 guidance and the online applications.

Review the Strategic Plan reports under the October 10 meeting information on the ECSAC webpage.

NEW! Child Care Discretionary Funding Opportunities Coming in 2023 and 2024

Activities and timelines for the child care [ARPA Discretionary Spend Plan](#) were discussed during the October ECSAC meeting. Review a copy of the [ARPA Discretionary Funds Timeline](#).

More information about these opportunities will be shared in the coming weeks. As new funding opportunities become available, the OOC will announce them through various emails, webinars, and websites.

REMINDER! National Parents as Teachers Day

November 8 is National Parents as Teachers (PAT) Day, a day to recognize the thousands of organizations offering PAT services across the country and around the world.

Here's to the thousands of parent educators who give parents of young children support and information to help all children learn, grow, and develop to realize their full potential.

- The deadline to apply for grants is **November 17, 2023**.

For questions, contact the Office of Childhood at Preschool@dese.mo.gov or call 573-751-6793.

REMINDER! Check Your Professional Development Learning Record

The end of the year is coming soon. Please check your completed clock hour training list to see if you are 'In Compliance' for all years listed on your report. To understand your report, please read the instructions for 'INDIVIDUAL REPORTS' (currently found on page 36) of the [MOPD User Instructions](#).

Questions? Contact us at 573-526-8273 or mopd@dese.mo.gov

NEW! Referral Resources Now Available

Using American Rescue Plan (ARP) relief funds, the OOC worked with a vendor to develop *The Welcome to First Steps for Families* and the *First Steps Information for Referral Sources* videos. Both videos are available in closed captioning in English and Spanish.

The videos can be found on the [First Steps Parent Information webpage](#) under the Referral and Eligibility drop down.

In addition, the OOC created a new one-pager titled "[Referral Sources: Who Can Make A Referral to First Steps?](#)"

We hope these videos help both families and referral sources to understand the First Steps program better and make a referral when appropriate.

REMINDER! Sign Up for Missouri Professional Development System

The Missouri Professional Development (MOPD) system includes a training calendar to help professionals find quality local and online trainings, a learning management system that hosts online on-demand training, and a registry that tracks training completion.

Professionals in the system must be linked to an organization so employers have access to data for

All families expecting a child or who are parenting children that have not yet entered kindergarten, are eligible for PAT parent education services. [Follow this link](#) and enter your home address to locate a PAT Parent Education Program.

Learn more about National PAT Day by visiting the [Parents as Teachers](#) website.

REMINDER! Proposed Rule Updates for Licensed Group Child Care Homes and Centers

We wanted to share a brief update on the [proposed rule updates](#) to 5 CSR 25-500 that were filed in June.

The proposed amendments are to allow for 16- and 17-year-olds to count in the staff/child ratio, add group size limits for children three years of age and older, and clarify when staff/child ratios and group sizes apply throughout the day.

The public comment period for these rule amendments ended August 17, 2023. The Orders of Rulemaking that address public comments were approved by the State Board of Education in September.

The rule updates are still working their way

reports on completed clock hours, CPR/First Aid certification, and Safe Sleep requirements.

If your organization is not in MOPD or your staff is not linked to your organization, start now! Find updated courses for clock hours by searching 'DESE OOC' as the training sponsor.

For more information about how to use the MOPD system, visit the MOPD webpage for written and video instructions.

REMINDER! Keep Your Outdoor Space Maintained

This is a reminder for licensed, license-exempt, and subsidy child care providers.

With the changing of the season comes the need to keep your outdoor play space maintained and free of hazards. As leaves fall, so do tree branches. Sticks or tree branches with sharp edges can be used by children in dangerous ways.

Be sure to conduct a walkthrough of your outdoor play space each day, prior to outdoor play.

COMING SOON! Afterschool Grant Opportunity Open

OOC staff are working on another competitive grant opportunity that will offer funding for entities for afterschool programming in the second semester of the school year (i.e., January to May 2024) to support keeping school-age students safe and engaged in enrichment opportunities. Watch for an announcement next week with more details about the grant application.

ANNOUNCEMENT! Safe Cribs for Missouri Website Update

The Safe Cribs for Missouri program provides portable cribs and safe sleep education to low-income families that have no other resources for obtaining a crib.

The OOC recently updated the [Safe Cribs for Missouri program webpage](#). The map located under the "Geographic Availability/Contact" tab, now lists all Safe Cribs Missouri programs, along with their contact information

through the rulemaking process and **are not** effective at this time. The OOC will communicate further updates when available.

ANNOUNCEMENT! Enhancements to 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

The 988 mental health crisis line now has American Sign Language services for callers who are deaf and hard-of-hearing, allowing them to video chat with counselors who are able to sign with them directly and confidentially.

Direct dialing from a "videophone" will be available within a few weeks.

[Visit the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline to learn more.](#)

REMINDER! Seasonal Flu Prevention Tips from Elmo

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention partnered with Sesame Street to produce a new video featuring Elmo explaining ways to stay healthy this flu season.

Check out [this video](#), which can help children practice habits, such as washing their hands and sneezing into their elbows.

A “Data and Reports” tab was also added. In this section, you will find our summary reports featuring program impact information.

UPDATE! CRRSA and ARPA Stabilization Close Out Reports

The OOC is closing out two federal child care relief grants. Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) funds were distributed by the OOC between September 2021 and October 2023. Over \$185 million were distributed to support workforce development activities, child care programs, and families receiving child care subsidy. [Check out the final CRRSA Close Out Report.](#)

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Stabilization funds were distributed by the OOC between September 2022 and October 2023. Over \$444 million were distributed, with 94% of the funds going directly to child care providers. [Check out the final ARPA Stabilization Close Out Report.](#)

Spotlight on Success

Spotlight on Success aims to share stories from local programs that are building community partnerships in order to strengthen and coordinate childhood programs.



This month's Spotlight on Success is First Step Preschool, a mission of First Christian Church, in Troy, Missouri. Through the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) grant, First Step Preschool has offered nearly \$15,000 in financial assistance to families in need in the community since January 2023. This

funding will continue to allow families to attend First Step Preschool tuition-free through at least May 2024. In addition, First Step Preschool has assisted families experiencing financial hardships throughout the year by forgiving their overdue tuition balances. This has given families “a fresh start towards staying up-to-date with tuition payments,” said Jaimie Simms, First Step Preschool Director.

Last summer, First Step Preschool also provided a child with a full-time tuition-free summer camp opportunity to attend their program.

Jaimie also shared that their PPP grant funds are allowing the program to update its outdoor playground area this fall. “This new area will enhance our children’s outdoor experiences. As we know, this positive playground exposure is imperative to their development, including better physical health, sensory stimulation, stronger verbal and social skills, as well as expanding children’s attention and cognitive ability,” said Jaimie. The new playground will be open to families in the community to enjoy outside of preschool hours.

Throughout the year, First Step Preschool partners with the church and businesses within the community to host special events at the preschool. They recently hosted a Preschool Community Helper Fair where children learned about each of the community helpers. Together with the church, First Step Preschool also hosts an annual trunk-or-treat event and assists families in need during the holiday season.

Through the support of the church and these grant funding opportunities, First Step Preschool strives to be a pillar for early childhood education within the community.

UPDATE! Preschool Development Grant



The Preschool Development Grant Birth to Five (PDG B-5) provides funding over three years to coordinate a more effective, high-quality early childhood system that better prepares Missouri children for success.

Each month, the OOC hosts a live webinar to provide updates and information about the PDG B-5 to stakeholders. A [recording](#) and the [PowerPoint slides](#) from the October webinar is available in case you were unable to attend and wish to hear the information. You can view archived webinars here:

- [September 2023](#)
- [August 2023](#)
- [July 2023](#)
- [June 2023](#)
- [May 2023](#)
- [April 2023](#)

The [PDG B-5 dashboard](#) is also updated monthly. This dashboard provides an at-a-glance look at priority areas, budget status, and key accomplishments.

PDG B-5 Monthly Webinar

Join us for the next PDG B-5 Stakeholder webinar on Tuesday, November 28, 2023, from noon to 12:45 p.m. to learn more and ask questions. You can [access the webinar](#) in a Google Chrome or Safari web browser. Do not view in Internet Explorer. We hope you can participate!

For questions about the stakeholder webinar series, or suggestions for topics in future webinars, email us at Childhood@dese.mo.gov.

Archived Editions of Childhood Connections

Visit the OOC website to find previous editions of Childhood Connections.

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